



Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs

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Students Place Wreaths at Veterans Cemetery

Seeing the Real Thing Makes an Impact

(For Digital Photos, email lisa.aug@ky.gov)

(RADCLIFF, KY, December 14, 2007) Katie Jo Hall bent to place a Christmas wreath in front of a row of tombstones, stepped back, and stood for a moment with her hand on her heart.

“To take part in this and see these tombstones,” the East Hardin Middle School student said, “it’s an amazing experience. To lay the wreath there, it touched my heart.”

Katie Jo was one of 14 students of Library Media Specialist Mary Carruthers who brought 50 wreaths to Kentucky Veterans Cemetery Central. They did so as part of the national Wreaths Across America event that shows gratitude for the past, current, and forthcoming sacrifices our veterans and their families make for our Nation.

“I came here to get out of class,” Cassie Goodwine admitted, “but seeing the tombstones really touched me.”

“It makes me feel lucky,” said Megan Compton, “that people sacrificed their lives for our freedom.”

"I'm especially gratified to see young people come out here today to respect and honor our veterans," Cemetery Director Charles Heater said in a short presentation before the wreath-laying.

"I didn't realize the impact it would have on me," said Autumn LaFollette, "until I read the writing on the tombstones."

"It's an amazing opportunity and experience to place these wreaths," said Brian Nichols. "Each tombstone has a family and a story behind it."

"It really changed the way I thought about war," said Dominique Chartnoller. "That these people died for me, for our freedom. I really feel special that people are fighting for me. I hope other schools do this."

"I expected maybe one or two tombstones," Nikki McCamish said. "I read on the stones about fathers, mothers, sons. That could be my family member. It makes you actually think about it."

"As I stood there," Kendra Ball said, "when I see that people died for our freedom, it tugs your heart. I didn't know whether to smile or cry, but it feels good to place the wreath."

"It's important that we do this and honor veterans," Logan Elmore said, "because some of them don't have anybody and they want to be honored. We need to show everybody that we do care."

"I have veterans in my family," Austin Huffer said. "I can't imagine losing them, so I do feel sympathy for the veterans buried here. You really think about what these people give to us."

Ms. Carruthers, who is married to a retired military veteran, and whose son-in-law is an active-duty soldier currently deployed overseas, suggested the idea as a way to teach her students to respect and honor military veterans.

"They took it and ran with it," she says. In only the short time since Thanksgiving, students raised enough donations from their classmates, families and churches to purchase 50 wreaths. Ms. Carruthers says Frank Otte's Nursery in Elizabethtown gave them a discount price.

"This is new for us, but we're hoping it will be bigger next year," Ms. Carruthers said.

Although the national ceremony of wreath-placing at veterans cemeteries takes place on Saturday, December 15 at noon EST, Kentucky Veterans Cemetery Central held their ceremony today to accommodate the students.

The ceremony at Kentucky Veterans Cemetery West in Hopkinsville will be held at the Committal Shelter and conducted by Capt. Wilson Polidura of the KY-216 Ft. Campbell Composite Squadron. During the ceremony, wreaths representing veterans from each branch of service will be placed beside the branch's corresponding flag. Cemetery Director Richard Stanley will also be in attendance. For further information about the ceremony in Hopkinsville, please call either Capt. Wilson Polidura at (931) 358-9881 or the cemetery at (270) 889-6106.

Wreaths Across America is a non-profit organization that began over 15 years ago when Worcester Wreath Company started placing wreaths on the headstones of fallen heroes at Arlington National Cemetery. Today, the tradition continues as the Civil Air Patrol, the Patriot Guard Riders and other civic organizations place wreaths during a special observance at each of the over 230 State and National Cemeteries, and Veterans Monuments nationwide.

Kentucky Veterans Cemetery Central serves veterans mostly from a 75-mile radius of the cemetery, including parts of Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio. It also serves as the Active Duty cemetery for soldiers and their dependents serving at nearby Fort Knox. The cemetery is located adjacent to Fort Knox, at 2501 North Dixie Boulevard (U.S. 31W.)